

By Bill Husfelt

Superintendent, Bay District Schools

January is an exciting month in our district because it's time for our annual Excellence in Education Awards Ceremony which honors our amazing employees.

On Saturday, 110 of the most dedicated instructional and support employees will gather at the Helen Blackburn Auditorium on the campus of J.R. Arnold High School to be recognized as the Bay Education Foundation Rookie Teachers of the Year, the Ann F. Smith Support Employees of the Year and the Teachers of the Year from their respective schools and departments. We will also be recognizing, and announcing, our overall winners in those categories and honoring our Assistant Administrator of the Year Brandon Poiroux from Deane Bozeman School, our Assistant Principal of the Year Cheri Wroblewski from Rutherford High School and our Principal of the Year Todd Harless from Southport Elementary School.

Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors (PanCare, the St. Joe Community Foundation and the Bay Education Foundation), we will also honor two very special lifelong educators as our Teachers of a Lifetime. We began the Teacher of a Lifetime Award several years ago to recognize exemplary retired educators who have truly impacted the lives of children in our community. This year's winners, Bill and Mary Kay Thompson, are lifelong educators who taught music to thousands of children in our schools. Bill and Mary Kay continue to be involved in the music community, and we are excited to honor their commitment to our students.

ALL of our employees are deserving of recognition, praise and appreciation, and I wish we could literally honor them all in a ceremony like this. However, we have rules to follow and we must select district representatives for these honors so that those employees can represent us on the state (and maybe even national) level.

Our ceremony on Saturday will conclude with a dessert reception jointly catered by the talented culinary students enrolled in Chef Billy Redd's culinary programs at Arnold and ChartwellsK12. Culinary students throughout the district are so very passionate about what they do, and what they are learning, and I can't wait to see what Chef Redd's classes have planned for us!

We simply wouldn't be able to do any of this without the support of our generous sponsors and the volunteer time of our selection committee members who work so hard to ensure we're selecting the very best candidates possible. Apparently, they know what they are doing because we've had TWO Florida School-Related Employees of the Year winners in the past four years (Beth Lucas from Merritt Brown Middle School and Greg Lyon from Hiland Park Elementary School) and two finalists for Principal of the Year (Deniece Moss from West Bay Elementary School and Josh Balkom from Deane Bozeman School). So, fingers crossed for this year's winners in all categories 😊

I want to thank everyone who has worked so hard on this ceremony. I'd definitely like to recognize those who have contributed to making this event possible. Thank you PanCare, St. Joe Foundation and Bay Education Foundation. We have excellent educators, and it's a great privilege to spend a morning celebrating them!